



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – HMAS Perth & USS Houston Memorial

---

## **Remarks of Ambassador Bleich at the HMAS Perth and USS Houston Memorial, Perth**

*(As prepared for delivery – February 28, 2012)*

Thank you, Deputy Lord Mayor, and thank you to our Veterans, members of the Armed Forces, Families, honored guests, and friends. I am deeply grateful and honored to be with you all today. Your invitation means a great deal to me and to the people of the United States who cannot be here today to honor the memory of those who perished on this day 70 years ago.

70 years ago today, shortly after midnight, in the dark ocean, two great ships – the HMAS Perth and the USS Houston – were headed to Australia. They had survived the Battle of the Java Sea, but had to leave their group near the Southern Java coast to get repairs and ammunition. Unexpectedly, as they steamed into Banten Bay they encountered a Japanese flotilla. The Perth and the Houston were hopelessly outmatched. In fact, the Houston carried no torpedoes at all. Although weary from battle and with no chance of escape, their crews fought valiantly. The Perth sank a transport and forced three others to beach. Crippled by a torpedo strike, and with no torpedoes, the Houston gunners kept firing, sinking a minesweeper and damaging three different destroyers. Knowing they had no chance, they fought this impossible battle to the bitter end, before finally slipping battered beneath the waves. The men aboard these ships were Australians and Americans. And we are honored to have with us today two of those brave men, Mr Arthur Bancroft, Mr Norm Fuller, as well as the widows of two other courageous sailors, Mrs Nel Thompson and Mrs Florie Hill.

Here in Perth, and in the City of Houston, Australians and Americans gather today to remember that terrible loss. We remember the 1,046 sailors of the HMAS Perth and the USS Houston who perished. We remember the hundreds of sailors retrieved from the chilly waters of the Sunda Strait only to lose their freedom, their youth, their health, and in some cases their lives in prisoner of war camps. We remember the families that lost their son, their father, their brother, their husband. Birthdays never celebrated. Weddings never held. Children never known.

It is fitting that we remember this loss not on a cold sea, but from the warmth and security and comfort of this magnificent building, in this beautiful city of Perth, along this tranquil river. Because that is the cause for which these sailors gave their lives and



---

Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – HMAS Perth & USS Houston Memorial

---

freedom. They sacrificed in the hope that their efforts would allow others – Australians and Americans and all people – to live just as we are today: free and safe.

Our freedom was not free. It came at a terrible cost. There are no words of thanks that we can offer that could properly honor that sacrifice. Our challenge instead is to honor their sacrifice by devoting ourselves to those same ideals.

Just as they gave the last measure of their devotion together, so have we pledged to be devoted to one another. Together, Australians and Americans formed one of the strongest alliances in the world. Together, the Cities whose names their ships carried – Perth and Houston -- have pledged allegiance as sister cities, to be partners to each other. Together, we have created prosperity in these cities and in our nations – with ingenuity, hard work, and integrity. And together, our people gather today -- free to think as we choose, to worship as we choose, and free to choose our government. Two nations, united by principles and by gratitude.

We are partners in science, partners in education, partners in trade, but most of all, partners in peace. We are the truest and greatest of friends.

Today, and every day, we honor their memory best by doing nothing more nor less than this. By living just as they died: free and strong, committed to one another, and forever together.